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A PAIR OF VASES OF THE PERIOD OF LOUIS XVI

THERE are exhibited this month in the Room of Recent Accessions two vases of marble, with mountings of ormolu in the style of Louis XVI, which exemplify in their design and execution the standards of craftsmanship and taste which characterized the decorative arts of the late eighteenth century in France. Whosoever their designer, in form and decoration these vases owe their inspiration to suggestions contained in the plates of Delafosse and Piranesi, and in particular confess the influence of the classic vases engraved by the latter, which aroused the enthusiasm of amateurs and craftsmen by their dignity and pleasing form.

Beautiful in their general design, these pieces are of particular interest by reason of the excellence of their metal mountings, in which is revealed the open-minded approach of the craftsman to the expression of the design in his materials. They date from a period in which the fashioning of ormolu for the enhancement of the many appurtenances of interior decoration engaged the talents of sculptors of note, who did not scorn to apply their hand to such subsidiary arts. Clodion, for example, famous for his plastic creations, is credited with the purely decorative use of bronze for the fittings of elaborate interiors. The sculptors of the eighteenth century found in bronze a fascinating medium for artistic expression, and from the use of bronze in monumental

sculpture its application to purely decorative ends was but a step.

The methods of ormolu casting reproduce those of bronze, but in the two vases here considered there is found a combination of casting, engraving, and twisted work, each best suited to translate a particular element of the design into its material. The casting of the mounts has been done by the sand method, some from

models of considerable detail. The plinth and torus have been cast with plain surfaces, as have the main parts of the handles, while the remaining decoration has been carefully modeled in elaborated detail for casting. At the completion of the casting, the ciseleur with his engraving tool has given to the surface of the torus and the panels of the plinth the delicate treatment which casting would not have produced. He has also sharpened up and given finished form to the pearls above the torus and in the decoration of the lip, engraved the broad



VASE, FRENCH, PERIOD OF LOUIS XVI

line which follows the shape of the handle, and perfected the leaves and fruit of the other portions. Next, the bronze has been covered with sheet gold and fired until its fusion with the baser metal, after which the plain surfaces have been burnished. The portion of the handle which ends in the corkscrew motive has been cast in one flat piece, lined with the engraving tool, and twisted into its form with ironworker's technique. The small twisted insert in the handles has been similarly wrought.

The utilization of the ormolu here has

been particularly restrained and with so fine a sense of the problems inherent in the combination of two materials, so excellent a quality in its color and craftsmanship, that it is but reasonable to suppose that these two vases come from the workshop of one of the foremost makers of bronze-mountings of the time. From a consideration of the design alone, they might be attributed to one of three or four then active ciseleurs, but with the workmanship combined with the use of the various motives of design, it would appear that these pieces have come from the workshop of the most famous maker of them all, Pierre Gouthière. Gouthière, born at Lyons about 1740, executed works to order for the most famous collectors of the day. He was the hero of the sale of the collections of the Duc d'Aumont in 1782, and his financial ruin is directly due to the credit of 750,000 livres which he gave Madame du Barry, and which he was unable in his lifetime to recover. A pupil of Martincourt, his beginnings lie in the reign of Louis XV, but it was under the classical influence of the reign of Louis XVI that his work reached its greatest perfection.

Each of the details of our vases and its particular treatment can be discovered in examples of his work; the sureness and probity of the design and the superb quality of the craftsmanship are so undoubtable that in the absence of any signature upon them, we can only feel that these vases were the output of his large workshop, no doubt engaged the hands of the best of

his workmen, and not unlikely show the marks of his own chisel.

C. O. C.

THE PUBLICATION OF OBJECTS IN THE EGYPTIAN COLLECTION

OF recent years there has been a growing appreciation, on the part of scholars both American and foreign, of the importance of the Egyptian

collections in the Metropolitan Museum. As the antiquities here inspire students of archaeology to make them the subjects of their studies, they become available for a wider public than any which one museum can reach. In fact they pass, so to speak, into that world-wide collection which is preserved on our library shelves. And, incidentally, the authors of even the slenderest notices on objects in this Museum invariably repay us richly for their use of them by throwing upon them some new light which helps us in

our appreciation of them or serves to dignify them with their proper importance.

The following notes on some of the smaller objects in the Egyptian collection give some hint of this process and show what enlightenment is thrown by others on objects with which we ourselves have long been familiar.

Thus in the BULLETIN of March, 1917, two pieces of very early relief, now shown in the Third Egyptian Room,¹ were described and evidence adduced to show

¹Acc. No. 11.150.30-1.



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